

DON'T RELAX YET

You probably received some precipitation last week or over the weekend. As it warms up, grass will turn green and grow. So, are we back to normal? I'm not so sure.

Recent rains certainly were welcome. Nearly everyone now should have enough moisture for pastures and hay fields to green up and begin growing as temperatures increase.

Don't be fooled, however. Very few areas have completely refilled their soil profile with moisture.

Even if you do receive average moisture during the next few months, pasture and hay production still could be less than normal. Most years we begin the growing season with quite a bit of moisture stored in the soil profile, moisture that accumulated during the previous fall and winter. That did not happen this year so you probably need several inches of rain just to get back to where your soil moisture level normally begins.

You also might have a problem with the health and vigor of your pasture and hay plants. The plants in many pastures and rangelands last year experienced quite a bit of stress – stress due to dry weather, hot temperatures, and in many cases, over use. These plants will not be as thrifty this spring; some may have even died. These plants likely will grow more slowly this spring and have difficulty regrowing rapidly as rapidly as we would like after grazing or cutting. As a result, yields or carrying capacity could be lower than average.

What this all means is that you still need to manage your pastures and haylands for drought conditions. Graze conservatively. Don't graze too early or too short. It could take a full year or more of average precipitation to recover from last year's stresses.

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